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DEPARTMENT FOR AF DAS YAMAMOTO AND AF/E

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA NAMES COMMISSION TO PROBE
ELECTORAL-RELATED VIOLENCE

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES VICKI HUDDLESTON. REASON: 1.4 (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY. In response to calls from the international community and its citizens, the GOE named members of a commission of inquiry to probe the June and November electoral-related violence. Members of the new commission approved on December 6 by Ethiopia's parliament include religious leaders, judges, academics and business leaders. The commission is charged with preparing a report detailing the total number of deaths, the amount of property destroyed, and whether there were violations of constitutional or human rights; it has 90 days to release its findings. Opposition and independent members of parliament questioned the selection process and voted en masse against approving the commission, but deemed only three of the 11 members unqualified and potentially biased. Still, the commission faces an uphill battle in establishing its independence in the eyes of the domestic and international public. END SUMMARY.

RELIGIOUS, ACADEMIC AND BUSINESS LEADERS

2. (U) The House of People's Representatives (Ethiopia's national parliament) voted on November 14 to create an independent commission of inquiry to investigate this year's June and November electoral-related violence. Parliament charged the Legal and Administrative Affairs Committee (LAAC) with submitting a draft proclamation for the establishment of the commission and selection of members.

3. (U) During an open floor debate in parliament, the LAAC presented its proposed list of members and explained to MPs that members of the commission were selected on the basis of four criteria: political neutrality, professional competence and efficiency, social acceptance and ethical behavior. Furthermore, the LAAC said it selected members of the commission after an extensive and thorough evaluation process, and that none were members of the ruling EPRDF party. LAAC-recommended members of the 11 person Commission were:

-- Frehiwot Samuel (served as president of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples State Supreme Court), to serve as commission chair;
-- Shiferaw Jamo (served as an advisor in various government offices), to serve as commission vice chair;
-- Abune Paolos (Archbishop of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church);
-- Sheik Elias Redman (Deputy President of the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council);
-- Abel Musie (Roman Catholic Church official);
-- Dereje Jenberu (Deputy President of the Mekane-Yesus Church);
-- Hikmet Abdela Metek (business leader);
-- Gemechu Megresa (former Deputy President of Addis Ababa University);
-- Tamrat Kebede (former official of the African Development Bank);
-- Abdu Diad (Pastoralist Concern Association); and
-- Wolde-Michael Meshesa (Vice President of the Federal First Instance Court).

OPPOSITION QUESTIONS COMMISSION MEMBERS

4. (U) Opposition and independent MPs expressed concern that commission members had not been chosen by the public and that three nominees (including Sheik Elias Redman and Gemechu Megresa) did not meet the LAAC's own criteria. Opposition party members claimed that those with previous government experience or well-known ties to the current administration could not offer unbiased decision-making. LAAC representatives countered opposition MPs claims and insisted that each member complied with its requirements. Bulcha Demeksa, leader of the opposition Oromo Federal Democratic Movement (OFDM), reports that when he sought to object to a particular nominee, he was ruled out of order. On December 6, the EPRDF-dominated parliament voted along party lines (279 votes in favor, 99 objections, and five abstentions) to accept the LAAC recommendations, and authorized the commission to begin its investigation. (NOTE: The opposition

UEDF has 54 MPs, while the OFDM has 11, so many of the votes

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against the appointment of the commission must have come from MPs from the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) party, who have quietly slipped into parliament. There appear to be 59 such MPs. END NOTE.)

15. (C) COMMENT: Ethiopians are suspicious of government-appointed commissions or investigations in general. While the opposition granted it some credit by objecting to only three of its members, the new commission of inquiry faces an uphill battle to prove itself as an unbiased and fair entity. END COMMENT.
HUDDLESTON